



It's a good thing his clients worship him: New York plaintiff's attorney Tug Wyler gets little or no respect from most of the women in his life -- from his wife Tyler (Tyler Wyler?) to his paralegal Lily, a Puerto Rican beauty who keeps the office humming but accepts no lip from Tug, the central character with attitude in Andy Siegel's "Suzy's Case" (Scribner, 352 pages, \$26.00). Right from the git-go, I think Andy Siegel's Tug Wyler will be the protagonist of a series of page-turning, information packed thrillers. I hope so!

Tug drives his 1976 Cadillac Eldorado from his home in leafy Westchester County, north of New York City -- that's where Bill and Hillary Clinton have a home -- to his gritty office on the not-so-glamorous part of Park Avenue -- and all around the Big Apple in search of justice for his personal injury and medical malpractice clients. He gets many of his cases -- including that of brain-damaged African-American youngster Suzy Williams -- from Henry Benson, a high-profile criminal lawyer known for his unsavory clients.

At a meeting in Benson's Greenwich Village coffee shop base of operations, Tug is told that the case against the hospital where Suzy had been treated has no legal merit. Benson wants out of the multimillion lawsuit against a Brooklyn hospital, and turns the case over to Tug to handle. As Tug digs deeper into the case, he decides that Benson is mistaken.

When Tug meets the disabled but feisty little wheel-chair-bound Suzy Williams -- who was an off-the-IQ-charts genius before being treated for sickle cell anemia -- and June, her beautiful, resourceful mother, all bets are off. From here on out, Tug is on a wild ride that includes people who want him off the case -- and some who want him seriously dead. He meets a variety of characters, including an odd-ball couple who will give testimony in malpractice cases, provided there's plenty of upfront money. The woman physician and her controlling-beyond-belief husband turn out to be the key to the mystery of Suzy's injury.

Andy Siegel

If you like the gritty urban realism of novels by the late, great George V. Higgins ("The Friends of Eddie Coyle") and the machinations of the characters in novels by the late, great Ross Thomas ("Chinaman's Chance," "The Fools in Town Are On Our Side," "The Seersucker Whipsaw") -- two of my all-time favorite writers -- you will groove to Andy Siegel's Tug Wyler and his friends and enemies -- sometimes both at the same time.

It's no secret that street lawyers like Tug Wyler get little or no respect from other members of the legal profession, especially lawyers hired to defend the big-bucks hospitals and doctors. Tug gives his all for his mostly disadvantaged clients in a novel that may change your view of these so-called "ambulance chasers."

Here's a sample of Siegel's writing -- the opening chapter-- where Tug appears at a disciplinary hearing:

I'm standing near the corner of Twenty-Fifth and Madison on this bright sunny morning staring at the Beaux Arts-style courthouse just down the block, where it all started for me: the Appellate Division, First Department. The place where I was sworn in and admitted to the practice of law in the state of New York.

I never imagined it would also be the place where the practice of law could end for me, too.

As I wait for my attorney to arrive, so we can deal with certain allegations made against me, I see the street cart vendor who sold me a hot dog fifteen minutes after I took the lawyer's oath. That was eighteen years ago. He's stationed in the exact same place, at the curb in front of the courthouse steps. He looks exactly the same, too, just older with salt-and-pepper hair. Me, I've put on a few and now I buzz-cut close to my scalp what's left of my hair, riding the cusp between fashionable and just another bald guy.

I take in the structure of that mighty courthouse, a New York City landmark. The front facade is dominated by an imposing triangular portico supported by six Corinthian columns. The message sent is Don't mess with the law. But this particular building is more than just a courthouse that houses appeals, motions, and client complaints against their attorneys. It's an elegant blending of art and architecture, and I count no fewer than twenty-five sculptured marble figures. They're all over the place, on the steps, next to the columns, up on the roof—allegorical figures such as Peace, Justice, Wisdom, and figures in legal history such as Confucius, Justinian, and Moses.

But one is missing. There should be a sculpture of a Herculean figure near the arched entry doors with a large marble erection in his masturbating hand because some of the lawyers forced to show up here by client complaint against them are just being jerked off because of a bad case result. A legal outcome that was inevitable the moment the client committed the act requiring him to seek counsel in the first place.

Me, I'm guilty of the charge. Unethical Conduct.

Siegel -- himself a Westchester County resident and a personal injury and malpractice attorney with an office in New York City -- has modeled Tug Wyler on himself. It's obvious that Siegel is a car nut, because one of June Williams friends and protectors drives a 1962 Chevrolet Bubbletop 409, perhaps the first of the so-called "muscle cars." These vintage Chevrolets bring six figure prices at auto auctions.

About the author -- in his own words -- and the genesis of Tug Wyler:

"When a guy's been practicing law in New York City for over twenty years and is about to publish his first novel, you don't look at him and think, 'Hey, at Great Neck North High School on Long Island, they kept him in remedial reading through eleventh grade.' But it's true. There I was, meeting three times a week with about five other students in a classroom with a solid wooden door and a tiny window set up high to prevent nosy kids from sneaking a peek. The only problem was that, by junior year, everybody else was tall enough to look in.

"Being seen there never bothered me, though. If one of my buddies tapped on the window to catch my attention, making a stupid face, I merely held up my bag of Doritos, sipped my ice-cold Coke and pointed to the TV remote I was holding. Then, before turning back to the screen, I'd flash him a big grin.

"In fact, I should have been out of there sooner. But I was in no hurry to say good-bye to those deep, comfy chairs and fully stocked vending machines, the only ones in the building. As I sat there happily munching chips, it never once occurred to me I might one day publish a novel. What a crazy idea.

"But all things turn out to be connected -- even if you don't always understand right away why or how they are. From that classroom came my earliest identification with the underdog. Okay, I had great deal more confidence than the rest of the kids sitting around me -- and none of their other problems -- but I'd been one of them. I knew what it felt like to be on the wrong side of the door.

"Justice is something you shouldn't have to compete for . . . but it is.

"After I graduated from law school [Brooklyn Law School, class of 1988] and began practicing, I quickly realized it was the little guys of this world, the small fry, the ordinary joes who don't know how to stand up for themselves, who most engaged -- and needed -- my legal expertise and my fighting spirit.

"So how did Tug Wyler come into being? He was undoubtedly hanging around, shadowing my daily life for a long time; I just didn't know it. But here's the short version: one morning, on the train into the city from Westchester--where I live with my wife, three kids, three dogs and an upstairs cat--the idea of him just appeared in my head. I don't know from where. But there he was.

"Unable to shake the spell he cast, I began to write, each morning when I got on Metro North, what's now become 'Suzy's Case'. But I was doing it only to amuse myself. I sure didn't read courtroom mysteries or legal thrillers; as far as I was concerned, I was living them.

"It's common to diss malpractice and personal injury lawyers. Ambulance chasers, they call us. Me, I see it differently. As far as I'm concerned, we're the Robin Hoods of the profession, righting wrongs with every bit the same commitment he had to putting those culpable, most often the rich and powerful, in their place.

"Anyone, in an instant, can become a victim. Even you.

"The rush to cover up genuine wrongs of the sort that lie at the heart of Suzy's Case -- and the other Tug Wyler adventures I intend to write -- happens continually out there in the real world. Believe me, fiction doesn't know the half of it. What keeps me going into my office without fail each morning is my compulsion to make the system work for the injured victim when the big insurance companies vigorously resist such an outcome. It isn't easy, but it's what I do, and I love it.

"I should add, it's no secret I enjoy joking around and have what some might even call a warped sense of humor. But though my methods may appear like smart-aleck comedy to my adversary or to the fellow in the robe with the gavel, my frequently unconventional approach is critical to helping me stay

sane, dealing as I do on a daily basis with one set of catastrophic circumstances after another. One thing is certain: no one opposing me is ever able to anticipate all the angles I might spring in the course of a legal brawl.

"For Tug Wyler readers, I promise the same mix: a rule-bending high-tension conflict during the course of which you'll laugh in spite of yourself . . . while never knowing what's going to happen next. Like me, Tug's the kind of street-smart push-it-to-the-limit lawyer you'd want on your side when the worst has happened."